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ABSTRACT

One particular death and the rituals, funeral ceremony, and mourning which followed it are used to explore the relationship of the living to death. The particular death described was one which occurred during a year of fieldwork among urban Punjabis. By examining the category of mourners, it was possible to discern a structure within which grief and loss were articulated and thus the connections between individual grief and societal patterns of mourning were made apparent. Life and death are seen as polar opposites between which rituals of mourning must mediate. This mediation becomes possible only if we conceptualize the mourners in this culture as a heterogeneous group rather than a homogeneous one. The heterogeneity is provided by the sharp distinction in the roles of women and men on the one hand and kin and affines on the other. It is their differential symbolic function that allows the work of mourning to proceed by making it possible for mediation between life and death to occur. Suggestions are also made for extending this perspective to cross-cultural situations. (IS)

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The Work of Mourning: Death in a Punjabi Family

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The Work of Mourning: Death in a Punjabi Family

The subject of death has a perennial attraction for the human mind.[1] There is no known society, historical or contemporary, that has not ritualized death, made it a subject of mythology and folklore, speculated on its origins and its finality and tried to contain its disruptive effect on meaning in human life. No wonder philosophers have characterized human societies as communities in the face of death and described social reality as constantly threatened by lurking irrealities.[2] In the anthropological and sociological traditions, Durkheim (1947) gave special importance to piacular rituals as providing the means for heeling the wound inflicted upon a community by the death of one of its members. Malinowski (1948) characterized death as the final and supreme crisis of life and found in it an important source of religion. Nozick summarized the problem

posed by death in the following words: "Granting that life ending in death is in tension, at least with our existence having meaning, we have not yet isolated why this is so." (Nozick 1981: 581).

Isolating why this is so may proceed on a route of philosophical enquiry, systematically examining and separating the various ways in which meaning may be threatened by the acknowledgement of man's finitude. Or else one could follow a different mode of enquiry, primarily historical or sociological in orientation. For example, Philippe Aries's (1981) masterly survey of changing attitudes towards death in Western societies since the Middle Ages helps us to understand the social rather than universal location of these attitudes. Understanding the modes of being human in different societies and different periods of time shows us the limits of our own experience and this is the most valuable lesson of history and anthropology. They demonstrate the power of human imagination in resolving the tension between our finitude and our attempts to lead a meaningful life.

The Present Study

Both Durkheim (1947) and Malinowski (1948) emphasized the function of death ceremonies in creating a secure world of meaning for the individual. In the ceremonies of death,

said Malinowski, the culturally valuable belief in immortality is given body and form. Nowhere is this statement more beautifully illustrated than in Hertz's classic essay on death (Hertz 1960). Hertz showed that if we concentrate on collective beliefs relating to death, these may be best discussed as three separate complexes - beliefs relating to the body, beliefs relating to the soul and beliefs relating to the mourners. He argued that visible changes upon the body consequent upon death are related to beliefs about the invisible changes in the soul. It is only after a period of liminality that the dead man is viewed as separating himself from the living and finally settling down among the dead. This is the period when the mourners are separated from the society of ordinary men, are often seen as polluted and have to be slowly reintegrated into the society of ordinary men and women.

In the Indian case, recent works by Kaushik (1976) Das (1976 a) and Parry (1981) have demonstrated that the scheme outlined by Hertz could be successfully used to understand the transformation of the dead man from the state of the living to that of preta (ghost) who is finally transformed into pitr (ancestor) through the proper performance of rituals. Kaushik (1976) showed that the ritual functions of caste specialists who performed the various rituals relating to death could be understood within a triadic structure.

The barber mediates the mourner's relationships with the dead body (shava). During the liminal phase when the dead person is conceptualized as having the form of a ghost (preta), the caste specialist who guides the mourner into making food offerings to this ghost is the mahapatra, a caste of funeral priests who are considered to be Brahmans but who occupy a very low position in the caste hierarchy. The end of mourning rituals when the death impurity of the mourners is terminated corresponds to a change in the conception of the dead person who is seen as finally integrated into the world of ancestors by becoming a pitr (ancestor) himself. Rituals directed towards the dead person as ancestor are officiated by the purohita or the pure Brahman priest. Thus the three aspects of death rituals - those dealing with the dead body and directed towards its disposal; those dealing with the intermediate or liminal phase when the dead person is seen as separated from the living but not yet integrated among the dead; and the final phase in which he is incorporated into the society of dead are clearly identified by the different terms - shava, preta, and pitr - as also by the differential functions of the caste specialists.

The importance of certain ideas specific to Hindus was underlined not only by the manner in which the social divisions of caste could be better understood in terms of the tripartite structure analyzed above, but also by the demonstration that death rituals were framed on the model of

sacrifice. Death could be viewed as the perfect sacrifice since the individual offered himself as a victim instead of using a substitute. (See Biardeau 1977 and Das 1983). These studies show how abstract ideas about immortality, danger, and purity are given a concrete form in the lives of the Hindus.

There is one important question, however, to which one cannot find any answer in these studies: how can we locate the subject in all these structures of collective representations? I recognize that this is an extremely difficult question to answer. If we move from the collective to the individual we encounter the problem that the coherence constructed by the anthropologist at the level of the collective may be unconscious, latent, or at the very least not well-articulated at the level of the individual subject. Levi-Strauss considers it inevitable that in any ethnographic description the subject should tend to disappear (Levi-Strauss 1969).[3] Ricoeur (1976) asks how can we move from structure to discourse?

If we start at the level of the individual and then try to move to the understanding of the collective, the task is as difficult as the construction of a grammar from the study of vocabulary. Yet death is an event that profoundly involves the individual. However aware one may be of the finitude of life and however well rooted the cultural belief

in immortality may be, the individual is faced with the task of severing a relationship yet not erasing it completely. My knowledge of death in general can never adequately prepare me for the trauma of death of a significant other or for my own death. The question of individual meaning in the context of death must be therefore addressed however unsatisfactory our attempts may be to bridge the hiatus between the individual and the collective.

One of the ways in which we could approach this question is to focus on an intensely personal emotion such as pain or grief and enquire how it is projected in an interpersonal space. In the context of death, I intend to examine the category of mourners to see whether we can discern a structure within which grief and loss are articulated, such that the connections between individual grief and societal patterns of mourning may be laid bare. Whereas Hertz (1960) and Dumont (1970), and others, have concentrated upon the pollution of the mourners and their temporary separation from the community, I shall concentrate in this paper on the grief of the mourners and the "work" of mourning through which a proper separation between the living and the dead is brought about. In order to address this problem I have drawn my materials from the lives of an urban Punjabi community among whom I conducted fieldwork for the duration of one year 1974-75. Some of this material has been reported in earlier studies (see Das 1976b, 1977 and Das and Nicholas n.d.).

The Community

I do not intend to describe the community detail but we need to understand some of the salient features of its social organization, so as to lay the framework for the later discussion. I studied a kinship network of fifty families. Selecting the universe in this manner has the disadvantage that one cannot select the families by using sampling procedures, but it has the advantage that the family is studied in the context of a wider kinship system and in important inter-actional settings. While the core of this kinship network was located in Delhi, there were a few families that lived in other towns. My contact with these families was primarily through marriages and deaths that occurred in the core families.

With the exception of one branch of this network which was settled in Eastern Punjab, all the other families had migrated from the cities of Lahore and Gujranwala on the partition of India. These families were traders by caste and had a long history of urban settlement. There was tremendous variation within this network in terms of income, occupation, level of education and living conditions. There was also a significant variation among the members of this network with regard to their sectarian affiliation.

It is well-known that Hindus in the unpartitioned Punjab were a minority, and lived in close contact with the Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs. Their major languages of communication were Punjabi and Urdu. Hence it is not surprising that many local level cults of the Punjabis displayed a syncretism of Muslim and Sikh elements. In the late 19th century, an important reform movement began to gain popularity in the Punjab. This movement, started by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and his followers, came to be known as the Arya Samajis.[4] Swami Dayanand Saraswati tried to reform Hinduism by attacking its popular practices such as idol worship, and performance of priestly rituals, which he described as "superstitions." He advocated a return to what he considered the pristine purity of Vedic Hinduism. This meant that whereas certain aspects of the Sanskritic tradition were seen as legitimate for the practice of religion, other aspects including those adopted from Sufism and Sikhism came under direct attack and were either abandoned by the Arya Samajis or incorporated at different levels of their practice.

There are two points of relevance in this connection that we need to mention here. The first is that some families belonging to the kinship network that I examined were strict followers of the Arya Samaj. Two of the ancestors in their genealogies had been converted to the Arya Samaj in 1877. In fact they were among the first three hundred Punjabis in Lahore to have been converted to this

sect. However, marriages between the Arya Samajis and the Sanatan Dharmis (followers of the eternal code of conduct - a name by which traditional Hindus in Punjab who were opposed to the Arya Samajis came to be known) were not forbidden. This meant that within a single kinship network and sometimes within the same family one could find adherents of both sects. Further, the families I studied differed considerably in the degree of strictness with which they followed the norms laid out by the Arya Samaj. Very often, concessions were made to allow traditional customs to be followed in order that one or another set of relatives may not be offended. This pluralism with regard to belief is essential for a comprehension of the variations that are possible within a single kinship network, not to speak of variations within and between larger social groups.

The second relevant point regarding the ideology of the Arya Samaj is that its anti-ritualistic orientation shifted the centre of gravity in death rituals from the elaborate priestly rituals and rules of pollution to a simple and ascetic performance of the necessary ceremonies. In his book, Samskara Vidhi, Swami Dayanand quoted the Yajurveda to argue that death rituals come to an end with the cremation of the body. He forbade the rituals performed by Brahmin priests and derided the Hindu belief that elaborate food offerings bestow appropriate bodies (e.g. preta-deha and bhoga-deha) on the dead man for the various transitional

stages before he could become an ancestor. Similarly, the elaborate rules regarding purity and pollution came under attack as having no basis in the Vedas. Hence the two favourite topics of the anthropologist--the study of non-verbal, culinary codes, and the study of rules regarding pollution, are found in a very abridged form in this community. It becomes all the more interesting, then, to see other layers of social life which had not received very much attention by the anthropologist surfacing for study. These include the customary laments on death, which have perhaps not been studied because their semi-crystallized forms are difficult to study within a traditional anthropological framework.

Anthropologists have been very successful in studying formal aspects of life when individuals can be shown to be playing roles, or when they are engaged in formal exchanges or when people are acting out rituals whose format is collectively agreed upon. But in the entire mushy area of life when individual emotion seems to confuse the formal pattern or when the context is not formally structured as in Levi-Strauss' (1969a) example of two strangers sharing a restaurant table in Paris, the models of the anthropologist begin to falter.

In the case of death, a certain embarrassment surrounds the discussion of grief which is quickly passed over in

favour of safer subjects such as the nature of death impurity, the food offerings, and the ancestral cult. This silence in the face of grief is a characteristic of modern Western sensibility. Hence, demonstrative mourning is alternately admired, seen as evidence of "honesty" and "unself consciousness" on the one hand and as causing "astonishment" and "terror" on the other (cf. McManners 1981: 297-298).

The funeral of Pyarelal

During the period of my fieldwork four deaths occurred in these families. The first two were of people who had grown-up children and who had died of disease. The third was of a pregnant woman, who died of a medical complication. The fourth death was of a young man who died in a tragic road accident. The first two deaths were seen as normal, not only in the sense that aboth persons had discharged many of their obligations as householders, but also because their deaths were not seen as violent. The third death was considered to be a violent one for the death of a woman during pregnancy or in childbirth is considered to be particularly dangerous for the survivors. She is said to become a ghost who will torment pregnant women and new mothers. Similarly the death of the young man was traumatic because it is considered particularly tragic for a parent to witness the death of a grown child and also because deaths resulting from homicide,

suicide, and accidents do not allow for an easy transition of the dead person into an ancestor. A contrast between the normal deaths and the violent ones would have been particularly instructive but cannot be taken for further discussion in this paper.

Let me take the two normal deaths for study here. These made me realize that the motif of one mourning may differ subtly from the motif of another although there may be considerable stability in the rituals. While rituals vary in accordance with the role and status of the person who has died, they cannot express the quality of the relationships that have been severed by death. For this we have to turn to the forms of grief and the verbal expressions of the people. Let me begin with the death of Pyarelal before I address the question of variation. Pyarelal died at the age of fifty-four. He had been ailing for a year. When he died people felt that he had died an early death but not an untimely one.

Pyarelal had suffered from a kidney ailment. His disease was characterized as a terminal illness by doctors. He was not informed of the prognosis of his disease. Over the years he slowly became bed-ridden. For almost two months before he died he was unable to perform any bodily functions without aid. He was cared for at home by his wife and children. According to all accounts, he was conscious until

the end. It was not known whether he had been conscious that he was dying even at the last moment.

In the last two months of his life, Pyarelal may have suspected that life was ebbing away. He had lost his appetite, was frequently nauseous, felt that his limbs had lost all their strength, but he somehow maintained a stoic silence. The most poignant story that I heard was that his wife had noticed tears in his eyes on the day that he found that he did not have the strength to get up in the morning and offer flowers to his favourite picture of Lord Rama and his divine consort Sita. This particular picture had belonged to him for as long as he remembered. He was not given to frequent visits to temples and did not have the patience to listen to religious discourses. His only gesture towards god was to offer flowers and stand in mute silence before this picture in the morning, and to offer his thanks to god with folded hands before going to bed. The only other event of importance to him used to be an occasional visit to the pilgrimage Hardwar where he loved to take a dip in the Ganga, and to float a tiny flower boat with a lighted lamp in the dark river at night. When he found that he did not even have the strength to get up for this simple gesture of prayer, he requested his daughter to bring that picture to his bed-side in the morning and at night.

For the last two months that he was ill, Pyarelal was

visited every evening by an old friend of his who was a vaid (practitioner of traditional Ayurvedic medicine). Patient and doctor would sit in a companionable silence sipping tea. The vaid had informed Pyarelal's wife that her husband did not have long to live. All the relatives had been informed. The family was visited frequently by the relatives. As his wife said, meeting the sick man was like darsan mele--a privileged viewing of the person, the quality of which is as ephemereal and transitory as glimpsing a beloved face in the melee of a carnival--before you have time to greet the person, she said, the face has disappeared.

The Last Day

Pyarelal died on the 31st of March. It was only in the last hour that it was realized that he was dying. His son rushed to the vaid who arrived at the bedside. Even as his son was rubbing his cold feet with powerful herbal remedies to stop the ebbing of life, Pyarelal shouted at him to go and prepare some tea for the vaid, instead of looking so stricken. These were the last words that he spoke. At the last moment the son tried to bring his picture of Rama and Sita to his bedside, but he was gone.

I was told that at first his wife insisted that he was not dead. But the vaid was firm that there was no calling him back. They then lowered his body on the floor. Pyarelal

had often said to his wife that he did not wish to die on the floor as good Hindus do. This was the reason that no attempt had been made to lower him to the floor in his last hour, a gesture that spells imminent death. According to the vaid it was the sight of his lifeless body lying on the floor that finally communicated the irrevocable fact of his death to his wife.

The widow now let out a loud wail and started hitting the wall with her head and breaking the bangles which are the signs of the auspicious state of wifehood. Widows are considered inauspicious and are not allowed to participate in the life affirming rituals of birth and marriage. The neighbouring women, on hearing the wails, left everything they were doing and rushed to her. They began wailing with her while men began to send appropriate messages and telegrams to the relatives. It is customary to make a little tear on the side of a letter if it carries news of death.

When I arrived, having been informed of the death, the women were sitting around the corpse and were wailing. At this point it may be necessary to explain the structure of certain events in the funeral. I have been told by my informants that it was customary among the Punjabis for women relatives to surround the body, all the while wailing loudly, beating their breasts, and inflicting wounds upon themselves to the extent that some relatives would faint. This form of

mourning, known as *syapa*, was strictly for women. They were greatly aided by the availability of professional mourners. I have not been able to trace the social background or caste affiliation of these women except that the barber's wife always had an important role to play. The special position of the barber and washerman among the servicing castes has been noted by many authors (Dumont 1970; Pocock 1962; Srinivas 1959). In the Punjab the barber's wife mediated on birth, marriage, and death rituals. She acted as midwife on birth and carried invitations and news of weddings. She accompanied a newly married girl to her husband's house. Similarly the barber's wife played an important role in death rituals, washing the body of a female corpse, pairing the nails of female mourners, and sometimes removing the signs of the married state such as ornaments, red markings on the hair, from the body of a newly widowed woman (see Gill 1977; Hershman 1981 and Tandon 1961). The professional women would arrive in a house where death had occurred. They would sing ritual laments while moving round and round in a circle, and making frenzied rhythmic movements. They were joined by the female relatives of the dead man.

While women were required by custom to indulge in an orgy of grief and self mutilation, and were encouraged to vocalize the grief for the dead person, men were required to maintain a stoic silence. The Arya Samaj attempted to purge the death ceremonies of the "undignified" mourning performed

by professional mourners. They were successful to the extent that professional mourners are not found in urban centres today. However, this has not eliminated the wailing and self-injury by women relatives.

As Durkheim (1947) observed in his study of piacular rituals, even when mourners seem to be giving themselves up completely to grief and are inflicting horrible injuries upon themselves, one can discern the presence of a certain structure. For example, among the Australian aborigines, the appropriate amount of injury to inflict upon oneself is determined more by kinship distance than the by the violence of the grief. Thus, we have to examine carefully the structure behind the spontaneous and often unbearable expressions of personal sorrow.

To return to our description, the women were sitting around the body when I arrived. As each relative arrived, he or she would be greeted by a wail led by one of the women already present, which would identify some aspect of the newcomer's relation with the dead person. If the person arriving was a woman she would sit in front of the widow, hug her, and let out a loud wail addressing the dead man. From the widow she would move to the children, hug them and cry. If the person who had arrived was a man he would sit quietly at the periphery of the circle holding his head in his hand, or wiping his eyes.

All the mourning laments, whatever their particular content, focussed on one basic theme. This was that the dead man had voluntarily chosen death, deserted the living relatives, and thus must be persuaded either to come back or to take the living with him.[5] The following are a few examples:

The oldest woman present there was Pyarelal's aunt who kept saying, "My son, was this time for you to go? I am still living in the world, and you have gone? Please take me with you if that darbar (court) of Yama (the god of death) is so dear to you."

An elderly distant female relative made an entry - weeping and saying, "I knew, I knew this would happen. Last night I saw him in a dream. He was dashing, handsome and young and he was riding a bridal horse. His bride is death. The ill omen has come true."

The dead man's classificatory sister cried, "Brother, open your eyes just once this time. When we were young and we played hide and seek, you would open your eyes the moment I asked you to. Why are you so cruel today that you do not open your eyes even once though I beg and I beg?"

The widow's brother's wife said, "My children (referring

to the dead man's children) have been ruined. From where has this thunderbolt fallen? Whose evil eye burnt the prosperity of my sister's house? Oh, who will care for these orphans now?"

All this was interspersed by the widow's repeated sobs and her saying, "I want to go where he went. Take me on the same path as you have traversed today."

As the morning wore off, the laments became more stereotyped. Meanwhile, Pyarelal's elder brother had made the necessary arrangements for the funeral. It was conventional for the dead man's agnates to provide the shroud, the bier, ghee (clarified butter), incense, and havan samagri, which is a mixture of dry ingredients to be offered to the fire. The new clothes in which the corpse was to be dressed are conventionally provided by the affines. In this case it was the widow's brother who provided these clothes. A priest from the local Arya Samaj had been sent for.

The men were now getting restive. The work of the funeral needed to proceed. The women seemed unable to relinquish the dead body. The priest started urging the men to wash the body and prepare it since it would be very difficult to do so later. The widow's brother signalled to his wife and his adopted brother's wife that they must allow the body to be taken into an inner room and washed.

At this stage I was asked to go with some people to find out if it was necessary to obtain a death certificate. It was felt that my education might help me to negotiate on this intricate problem. The events of the next hour are constructed on the basis of what people told me and not my own observations.

I was told that the body was bathed and dressed by "relatives." On enquiring which relatives, I was told that the dead man's sons were considered to be too young to absorb the shock of handling their father's dead body. Hence others, "classificatory sons" (rishte vic ladke) had performed the necessary ablutions and dressed the corpse.

When I came back, the body had been washed, dressed in new clothes, and was lying on a bier in the gali (lane), just outside the door. The sons and brother's sons of the dead man lifted the body taking care to first touch it with their left shoulders. Several others came forward to touch the bier with their shoulders. This gesture has great symbolic importance. To give one's kandha (shoulder) to the dead man is to support him on his last journey. The Punjabis say that just as the dead man had carried his sons on his shoulders when they were little, so the sons now reciprocate by carrying him on their shoulders. When the corpse was lifted, everyone shouted in a chorus "Rama rama satya hai! The name

of god is true, it is eternal."

The widow seemed to have suddenly lost control. She rushed to the bier and said, "You have tied him too tightly. He hated tight clothes. Don't you know that?" She then clung to her son and said "Have you assured that the fire is not too hot?" Now her brother's wife came to pull her away. Several people started saying "Why do you argue so? Is death an adversary against whom one can win? Has anyone ever succeeded in erasing that which has been written? Keep calm, collect yourself, think of your children." Finally, the widow was calmed enough to let go of her son. The funeral procession proceeded towards the cremation ground, situated on the bank of the river Yamuna.

At the Cremation Ground

It was customary among the upper caste Punjabis that men carried the dead body to the cremation ground and the women stayed at home, wailing the loss that had been made even more concrete by the disappearance of the body. These days, however, women often accompany the funeral procession. In this case, most of the women assembled in the house went to the cremation ground.

According to the teachings of Arya Samaj, the services of ritual specialists, such as the barber to shave the

mourner, the Dom to give the funeral fire, or the Mahabrahmana to make pinda offerings, are forbidden. Similarly there are no rituals to remove the signs of auspiciousness from the widow's person. These are considered to be examples of the later corruption of Hinduism by the greedy Brahmans.

At the Nigam Bodh Ghat, where the body was taken for cremation, there is a separate pyre for the funerals of Arya Samajis. This is built as a sacrifical altar (Yajna kunda). In deference to the Doms, an untouchable caste which has a monopoly over the sacred fire of the cremation grounds, the elder persons of the family bought the wood from the Doms. The Doms laid out the wood on the pyre. Meanwhile, the mourners carried the body to the river front and immersed it in water accompanied by sacred verses. The eldest son, the chief mourner, was accompanied by some male relatives. He took some water in his hands and performed the necessary ablutions accompanied and verses. This simple ritual has replaced the traditional bath of the mourners.

The body was brought back and laid on the pyre. The face was uncovered for the last privileged viewing (darsana). All the mourners circumambulated it with their auspicious right side towards it and saluted it with folded hands. The widow touched Pyarelal's feet for the last time, ending the relationship by the very gesture with which it may have begun

some thirty years ago.

The priest covered the face of the corpse and recited some sacred verses. He then urged the eldest son to light the pyre. The son would simply not move. Everyone present seemed to have frozen for that instant. The boys' mama (mother's brother) went up to him and urged him to light the pyre. It was the sons' very special responsibility to do so--this responsibility could not be avoided and it could not be entrusted to anyone else. As if in a dream, the son stepped forward and lighted the pyre while the mourners chanted to implore Agni (fire), the representative of the gods, to take the dead person through the good path to the abode of gods. They urged Agni to burn more ferociously as he was being fed by the sacred havi oblations.

The mourners stood around the pyre, throwing handfuls of oblations and ghee to the accompaniment of verses. After the final oblations were offered, eveyrone stepped down. The Doms had agreed to keep watch and two nephews of the dead man were going to wait with them to see that the fire did not die out so that the body could be completely burnt. Although the rationalist ethics of the Arya Samajis does not allow them to acknowledge the existence of ghosts and demons, I think they considered it necessary to have some family members keep a vigil over the burning body precisely because the soul of the dead person is believed to be especially susceptible to evil

influences of ghosts and demons. The Doms were paid for their services and were also given the clothes in which Pyarelal had died, his personal effects such as his spectacles, and the bedlinen.

The priest made everyone sit down a little away from the fire and gave a short funeral oration about the indestructibility of the soul, the journey of the dead man towards the godhead, and implored everyone to try and bring peace to their ravaged hearts. He recited the prayers for peace (santipatha) and then the mourners slowly made their way home.

The subsequent ceremonies

In most discussions of death rituals among the Hindus, the description of ceremonies subsequent to cremation is dominated by rules of pollution and the various food offerings. The ceremonies of sraddha (etymologically the offering of sraddha or faith) terminate various stages of mourning and signal the invisible changes that the dead man is considered to be undergoing. According to the ideology of the Arya Samaj, as I have indicated, these ceremonies are forbidden. Swami Dayanand was especially opposed to the large scale feasting of Brahmans who are supposed to eat away the sins of the dead person.[6]

The Arya Samajis do not belive that sin is transferable or that one can "buy" merit by gifts of food. They do observe a number of taboos but these are seen as expressive of piety towards the dead rather than being markers of pollution. The most important taboo is that cooking fires are not lighted for four days and food is provided by neighbours. In the matter of clothes, white is worn by the mourners and all who visit them. The women do not wear ornaments or any auspicious red markings. There is, however, no taboo on combing of hair or shaving as is observed in many other Hindu communities.[7]

The most important obligation of the mourners, subsequent to cremation, is to sit formally for four days and read the texts of sacred scriptures such as the Bhagvad Gita. The Arya Samajis say that they do not believe in the lingering preta (ghost) of the dead man as other Hindus do, but they do believe that the soul (atman) of the dead man hovers around the house for four days. In this period the major religious duty of the mourners is to read the scriptures. Members of the family and friends take turns in reading the Bhagvad Gita. Hearing Krishna's words about the immortality of the soul and the perishability of the body is said to console the living and to help in severing the links of desire by which the dead man feels himself bound to the living relatives. It is said that the dead man is not yet reconciled to his separation. If his wife and children were

to cry for him then he would find it very difficult to leave them. Although I did not hear anyone say that the dead man may possess one of the living, it is clear that some danger to the survivors is envisaged. The apprehensions are not given a definite form.

In accordance with the beliefs mentioned above, the people who came to visit with the bereaved family for those four days were expected to listen in silence to the scriptures. They often sat around whispering about the way in which the close members of the family were affected by the death or the manner in which they were bearing up to it. These were also the four days in which relatives from other parts of the country arrived. On each new arrival, the women began to weep and express their grief. However, neither was the wailing loud nor was it allowed to continue for long. There is a quality of silence that marks these four days. It is a silence, however, which is always on the verge of being broken by the violence of the grief. For example, when Pyarelal's widow's sister arrived from Amritsar, the two women hugged each other and sobbed softly. Then in a split second, there were suddenly transformed into hysterically sobbing women who were consoled and separated, while the reading of the texts continued in the background.

On the fourth day (<u>chautha</u>) the male relatives went to the cremation ground to collect the bones known

euphemistically as "flowers." The bones and ashes were collected from the pyre in an earthen pot which was covered by a white cloth and brought home. At the sight of these "flowers" the women once again gave in to loud weeping. It was the most concrete symbol of the absence and void created by death.

Once the bones have been collected, the members of the family do not have to formally sit in mourning anymore. In a very few families mourning is formally terminated on this day after which agnates of the dead man take the bones and the ashes for immersion in a holy river such as the Ganga. For most others there is a final ceremony on the thirteenth day, which ends the period of formal mourning and after which the mourners return to the mundane world.

In this case, Pyarelal's sons and their father's brother took the bones to Hardwar, an important pilgrim centre, where the bones and ashes of the dead man were immersed in the river. I should mention that whereas most ceremonies had been held according to the injunctions of the Arya Samaj in Delhi, in Hardwar the men who had taken the ashes simply followed the local priest. They made the various pindha offerings prescribed for these occasions in the Pauranic texts. This is not the place to comment on the significance of this, nor is it sufficient to simply say that this is a departure from the norms of the Arya Samaj. The important

point is that a certain kind of pluralism is often permitted and even embraced by the survivors on the occasion of death which may not be encouraged on other occasons such as that of birth and marriage. It is felt that death involves so much that is unknown that it is best to accommodate different points of view rather than display a moral arrogance and offend others.

On the thirteenth day, the final ceremony known as pagdi ceremony took place. This is a formal occasion. These days, many families send black bordered cards to invite relatives and friends while others advertise the event in newspapers. Pyarelal's family had simply communicated the date of the pagdi ceremony by word of mouth. In any case invitations in the case of death convey only information. They are not signifiers of the family's regard for the invitees. In contrast, marriages are events in which people can easily take offense if they feel that they have not been properly and lovingly invited.[8]

When all the relatives and friends were gathered, the same Arya Samaj priest performed a yajna (fire sacrifice). The eldest son was the chief sacrificator accompanied by his brother, his father's brother, and his male agnatic cousin. After the yajna was completed the priest made a learned speech. He emphasized that this yajna commemorated the dead man, who was a virtuous person and had found release from

this world securing a place for himself in heaven. He commented upon the ephemerality of life, emphasizing that everything was a flux and we should not try to hold on to people, places and possessions. We should let go our hold on them. Then a pink pagdi[9] (turban) was handed over to him from the mama (MB) of the chief mourner. The mother's brothers of the chief mourner also gave gifts of money to his father's brother. The structure of gift giving can be gleaned from the accompanying genealogical chart. I shall discuss this chart in greater detail later. Here I only note that the major gift-givers were those affines who were bride-givers to the agnatic group of the dead man.

The priest tied the turban round the boy's head. Then he said, "I pronounce you the successor to your father. I hope that you will fulfill all your obligations. Your sisters and your father's sisters must continue to receive the same welcome and care in your house as they did during your father's lifetime. Learned and religious people, unannounced guests and travellers must share in the prosperity of your house."

At this stage the son stood up with the elaborate turban tied round his head. He first touched the feet of the priest and gave him daksina, the sacrificial fee that terminated the responsibility that each had undertaken towards the other. Then he touched the feet of the elders who were present

there, most notably his father's brothers, mother's brothers, and mother. Accompanied by close relatives he then moved towards the door. With folded hands, they stood in silence while all the people who were present filed out quietly folding their hands in salutation to the mourners, sometimes nodding and touching the mourners lightly, at other times saying, "We come," for one should not refer to any departures so soon after a death. This signalled the end of mourning and the return to normality although this normality had itself been fractured by the grief of death.

Certain commemorative rituals were to be performed at the end of six months and again at the end of a year, when yajna would be performed and the deserving and the poor would be fed. These, however, would involve only the close relatives and were not likely to be such "public" events. Taboos expressive of piety would be observed for one year by close relatives. These include the taboos on bright colours and ornaments by women, and a taboo on fried and sweet foods. The widow would henceforth wear only white.[8] These taboos, however, display a very different rhythm and it was clear that the most dramatic phase of the "work" of mourning was indeed over.

Discussion

Freud (1915) and Malinowski (1948) have both described

the emotional ambivalence towards death. As Malinowski said, the attitude to the dead is constituted by fear and fascination. The living have contradictory impulses to flee in panic as well as to follow the deceased to the grave. Seen from the perspective of the grieving individual, the ceremonies of death should help him make an emotional withdrawal from the dead person. But they must also assure that he does not simply flee away from the scene of death, and deny it completely. Malinowski's formulations inevitably draw one's attention to the category of mourners which Hertz (1960) treated as a homogeneous category. As we shall later explain, he did not pay very great attention to the differential symbolic functions of men and women; kin and affines; family mourners and professional mourners; a differentiation that I consider essential to the understanding of the structure and pattern in mourning. Hertz emphasized the separation of the mourners from the community of ordinary men. Since the dead person is believed to hover between the living and the dead for some time before he is finally accepted in the community of the dead, the mourners are endangered, contaminated and made the subject of stringent taboos for the period of mourning. It goes to the great credit of Hertz that he was able to show that the changes in the visible community of mourners may best be seen as indexing the invisible changes that the dead person is believed to be undergoing. I believe that we could strengthen these insights considerably if we combined them

with Malinowski's identification of the type of ambivalence that the living feel towards the dead.

Stated wihtout much preamble, my thesis is the following. It is not the dead who hover between the community of the living and the dead. Rather, these beliefs about the dead mirror the ambivalence of the living towards death--for it is they who hover between a fatal fascination to follow the fate of the dead man and the terrible temptation to deny his very existence. Rituals of mourning have to provide a mediation between these two opposite poles in which life and death are seen to be completely conjoined and which are seen to be in complete disjunction. This mediation becomes possible only if we conceptualize the mourners as having the structure of a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous totality. The heterogeneity is provided by the sharp distinction in the roles of men and women on the one hand, and kin and affines, on the other. It is their differential symbolic functions which allow the work of mourning to proceed by making it possible for mediation between these two poles to occur.

The Nature of Mediation

In the last decade we have learnt much on the structure of mediation from the work of Claude Levi Strauss (1969). As he has shown, it is best to understand the nature of

mediation from the perspective of non-mediation. The two poles of non-mediation, he has argued, are constituted by symbols of excess representing a complete conjoining of the opposites, and symbols of lack representing a complete disjunction of the opposite poles. Thus he has shown how noise and silence may represent excess and lack respectively, at the level of the acoustic code.[11] Both, however, signal the absence of mediation. When mediation occurs we have the emergence of meaningful speech.

In the case of death among the Punjabis, it seems to me that complete conjoining of life and death is represented through symbols of excess which are articulated through the behavior of women. Loud weeping, wailing, beating of breasts, and fainting mark the behaviour of women. Their laments basically express two ideas. First, that the dead man is not really dead but has simply turned away from them and can be persuaded to come back to life. Second, that they will follow the dead man to the nether regions and themselves relinquish life. The two kinds of laments are polar opposites in meaning but point to a single theme. This is the refusal of the women to allow a separation to take place between the living and the dead. It is not that women feel more grief than men. It is rather that the culture allows and even enjoins upon them the obligation to display symbols of excess.

Whatever the personal grief that a man may feel, immobility and silence are the only languages available to men. They act as if they were dumb and deaf and somehow incapable of comprehending that death has occurred and requires them to perform certain ritual and ceremonial roles.

I have sometimes seen a father, or a brother or a son (rarely a husband) suddenly break down and cry but he is immediately admonished for his "womanly" behavior.

It is to be noted that although I have characterized the behaviour of women as marked by symbols of excess, we are confronted at the level of the acoustic code, not by meaningless noise but meaningful speech. What are the characteristics of this speech? It seems to me that its most important characteristic is the marked use of ordinary words to convey the pathos of death. For example, women use such expressions as the departure of the dead man and the journey he has undertaken. They describe him as having been lured by the charms of another kingdom. Expressions such as "the man has closed his eyes, does not hear us speak and ignores our pleadings" cease being the expressions of everyday life and take on the character of ritualized speech. These activities are now part of a broken rhythm of departures and arrivals, the closing and opening of eyes, ignoring one's loved ones and paying them close attention, and it is this broken rhythm that transforms ordinary speech into metaphoric speech.

The most poignant motif in this culture is the description of death as the reluctant, shy bride who has to be wooed into submission. This description is dwelt upon at length if the person who has died is a young man as I found in the case of the twenty-seven year old man who died in a tragic road accident. This description is taken from the motif of a heroic death, for the warrior goes out into the battlefield to embrace death voluntarily as if it were his reluctant bride. In the case of Pyarelal, this motif was referred to once, when an old relative related a dream in which she had seen him riding a bridal horse. Such a dream conveys an ill omen, for it is a messenger of death. However, when an elderly person dies the reference to his death as a marriage marks a subtle shift in emphasis. It conveys the bhakti notion, popularized by Sufi saints in the Punjab, that for a saintly person death is a welcome event as it unites the soul with its beloved god. The death of a Sufi saint is alluded to as his marriage. Thus the voluntarism by which the close women relatives of the dead man conceptualize this event participates in a whole complex of ideas according to which it is only appropriate that a hero or a saint should happily embrace and welcome death.

Kin and Affines: Close and Distant Mourners

In the work of mourning, there is a diversification in

the symbolic functions performed by men and women as described in the last section. The mourners are further divided along the lines of kin and affines. I now propose to show the role of this diversification in the work of mourning.

If we pursue the genealogical chart that had been given earlier, we can see that it is possible to distinguish the women mourners between the close mourners and the distant ones. Before we examine the genealogical composition of these two types of mourners (for the question is a difficult one), let us first see the role of these two types of mourners.

Among the close mourners we can identify those who mourn on behalf of the dead man and those who mourn on behalf of the widow. All the women identified as "mothers" of the dead man, his brothers' wives, close sisters and daughters, as well as his own wife express the grief of losing an important and close relative. On the other hand, the close relatives of the widow such as her brother's wife, her sister and her classificator mother's sister mourn on behalf of their daughter or sister who has become widowed and who may have to be provided care and support. These are the women whose language expresses great personal grief at the loss they have encountered. Women whom I have described as distant mourners may be best described by identifying the group of

bride-givers to Pyarelal's agnatic group and the bride-givers to their bride-givers. In the former category would be included his brother's son's wife's mother and in the latter category of women who are designated collectively as samdhans. The term designates those who are related through the marriage of their children. Somewhat at the periphery of kinship relations, this group merges with the category of neighbours. Genealogically distant relatives whose contacts with the family have been peripheral mourn in a manner similar to the relatives mentioned above.

What are the functions of "distance" in the process of mourning? In general, the women who have been described here as distant mourners perform two functions. In the initial stages of the mourning, they join in the laments of the close mourners but since their memories of the dead man do not have a strong, personal content, their laments tend to be general in character. These laments include references to ill omens, chants on their ill-luck at not having been able to see the dead man in the last few days, and reference to culturally valued traits such as generosity, hospitality, love etc. which they attribute to the dead man regardless of whether he had demonstrated these qualities in his life or not. One realizes this by simply contrasting the general nature of their comments - "Oh, he was such a good man, he never turned away a poor man or a suffering man from his door, etc." - with the comments of the close mourners which capture the

individuality and specificity of the life that the dead man had lived. For instance, when the men were about to take the bier away, the widow rushed to her son and implored him to loosen the strings with which his body had been tied for "he hated tight clothes." Similarly she asked him if he had assured that the fire was not too hot as Pyarelal had never liked the heat of summer.

The distant mourners seem to have a great ability to be wailing loudly and beating their breasts one minute and then turning around to discuss the most trivial matter such as a child's school admission at the next moment. This often gives their performance a very theatrical appearance. One is tempted to characterize them as showing false emotion. Yet having watched this process closely, I am persuaded that they provide the language in which grief can be presented and expressed. Because of the participation of the distant mourners in this fashion, the close mourners are not allowed to relapse into silence. When grief seems to become inexpressible and the close mourners are too dazed to say anything, the distant mourners step in to wail loudly and thus nudge the close mourners to join in. Earlier the most distant mourners might have been the professional mourners. We may view them as providing the structural code or the mould through which individual grief found expression and received validation from the collective conscience.

The second important function of distant mourners was to provide consolation to the close mourners and this came to the fore in the ceremonies subsequent to cremation. Until the chautha was held when the ashes were collected, the mourners had to formally sit in mourning and read or hear appropriate scriptural texts, as described earlier. On these four days, the samdhans would often put forward views that may be described as fatalist. For instance, at one occasion the widow of Pyarelal suddenly remarked that if they were rich they could have saved her husband for she had heard that a minister in the government had suffered from a similar ailment and had been sent abroad for treatment. Her husband's brother's son's wife's mother, who had played an active role in the mourning immediately consoled her by saying that she should not grieve so--disease was simply a pretext that death found in order to fulfill its appointed task. At this stage, the diverse roles of men and women also become less sharply differentiated, and one can find people consoling each other in similar terms.

The distinction between close and distant mourners does not correspond strictly to the distinction between kind and affines, at least in the case of women. This is because women in North Indian Kinship are Janus-faced creatures as noted by Dumont (1975). The in-coming wives are slowly incorporated into the husbands' group and thus loose their characteristic of being affines. Hence time enters into

kinship relations significantly. A man's mother, his brother's wife as well as his sons' wives are "brides" of the family in structural terms. In temporal terms the sons' wives have a more affinal character than the mother. Considerations of time are important not in terms of reckoning generational distance but also as clock time. For instance, the widow's classificatory sister had two married sons. One of the sons' wives mourned as a close mourner while the other did not participate much since she had been married for a short time only and would take time to be incorporated into the family. Distance which is a function of time, however, is different from structural distance. Unlike the latter the former will be transformed into closeness in the future.

The structural position of out-going sisters and daughters is the inverse of in-coming wives. Whereas geneologically close daughters mourned as close mourners identifying themselves completely with their natal groups; genealogically distant daughters and sisters had the choice of either identifying with their natal groups or affinal ones. Genealogical nearness always signals closeness in the case of daughters and sisters. Genealogical distance has to be mediated by other factors such as close residence friendship etc. to preserve nearness of the relationship.

The distinction between kin and affines is clearer in

the case of men and is best articulated in the structure of gift-giving as shown by Vatuk (1975) and Dumont (1975). Gifts of money came from bride-givers to bride-receivers, the major recipient being the dead man's brother. The major gift-giver was the brother of the widow. Her second brother played a subsidiary role since he was an adopted brother and chose for himself a low-keyed role. It is the structural position of affines who mediate nearness and remoteness, that allows them to signal the termination of mourning by gifts. Kinsmen, by virtue of being too close to the dead man, and strangers by virtue of being too remote, could not play these roles.

This particular role of the affines is also expressed in less crystallized forms. It is they who persuaded the women to relinquish the body when the latter seemed unable to do so. Similarly, it was the chief mourners' mother's brother who urged him to light the pyre. It is as if society intervenes through the affines to mediate the two poles of conjunction and disjuncton between life and death.

One final point needs to be mentioned here. The Arya Samajis do not employ members of the lower castes to perform the "polluting" and dangerous tasks of washing the body, or preparing the mourners. Instead, the handling of pollution becomes an index of intimacy. Thus the washing of the body which may be entrusted to members of lower castes because of

its polluting nature in other parts of the country, is entrusted to close relatives here - younger male agnates in the case of a man and women who are "wives" to the agnates group in case of women. By participating in these "polluting" and "dangerous" tasks they show their love for the dead person.

The Comparative Perspective

One may ask whether the conclusions arrived at in the paper have any general validity. It seems to me that there are two important points in this paper which could be examined in a cross-cultural perspective. First of all, the attitude to death cannot be characterized in terms of an essence, such as "romantic," "macabre" or "distant" as was done by Aries (1981) in his study. Rather the societal attitude to death is best described in the form of a dialogue. In my own study it appears that the dialogue is between a point of view which may be described as voluntarist for it sees death as voluntarily embraced even as one embraces a beautiful bride. The second point of view may be described as fatalist for it represents death as a violent, forcible, and inevitable seizure of life. It was the close women mourners in the case studied above who represented Pyarelal as having voluntarily chosen death. In contrast, the affines and neighbours who had to undertake the task of consoling the mourners represented death as a formidable

adversary, as a thief who steals in unaware. According to them, the so-called causes of death such as disease and accident were only the pretexts (bahane) for death to perform its appointed task. Thus the arrangement of roles in a funeral gives an institutional locus to this dialogue. It is interesting to ask whether the attitudes to death within a single culture that have often been characterized as contradictory may not be part of a dialogue representing the two poles on which the work of mourning rituals oscillates.

Secondly, the mediation provided by death ceremonies in our study has the structure of a series of oscillations. The process of mourning proceeds by moving between the opposite poles constituted by the noise and excess of women and the silence and immobility of men. This is not to suggest that women are always identified with symbols of excess. We have only to shift to other codes (e.g. culinary) and other events modelled on the analogy of death (e.g. equinox) to see that even in Punjab these roles can be exchanged between men and women. The point is that the binary distinction of gender is used to articulate the opposition between complete conjunction and complete disjunction of life and death.

Apart from the oscillation between men and women, the mourning process is also constituted by the diverse functions of distant and close female mourners. The former provide the collective code, or the structural mould which can give form

to the grief. Finally the opposition of kin and affines among the male relatives provides the momentum and the punctuation to the process of mourning.

What happens when mediation fails? Geertz (1973) has provided us with a very interesting case study of precisely such a failure of the ritual process. He describes how ritual faltered in providing a secure world of meaning in the case of a sudden death of a young boy in the city of Modjokotu in Java. In that case religious meaning and political meaning became so jumbled that for a long time the mourners were unable to decide which were the proper ritual procedures and proper ritual functionaries to perform the ceremonies of death. Geertz traces the disruption of the funeral to a single source, viz., "an incongruity between the cultural framework of meaning and the patterning of social interaction: an incongruity due to the persistence in an urban environment of a religious symbol system adjusted to peasant social structure" (Geertz 1973: 169).

On reading the careful account of this disruption provided by Geertz, one wonders whether it is adequate to characterize the failure of ritual in this case as the failure to provide a "secure world of meaning." Would the disruption of ritual hold a different meaning if the ritual disrupted had been that of a marriage rather than that of death? Geertz seems to feel, at least implicitly, that the

two could be treated at par. Yet his powerful description tells us the exact consequences of the disruption of a funeral, and helps to give content to this otherwise vacuous expression about meaning. There are two episodes of importance in his account. The first when the mother lost her composure and insisted on seeing the body of the child before it was wrapped. In the words of Geertz:

> The father at first forbade it, angrily ordering her to stop crying - didn't she know that such behavior would darken the boy's pathway to the other world. But she persisted and so they brought her, stumbling to where he lay in Karman's house. The women tried to keep her from stumbling too close, but she broke loose and began to kiss the boy about the genitals. She was snatched away almost immediately by her husand and the women, though she screamed that she had not yet finished; and they pulled her into the back room where she subsided into a daze (Geertz 1973: 159).

Later, people admonished the mother, saying "Calm yourself, think of your other children - do you want to follow your son to the grave?"

The other point of tremendous tension was when a bystander suggested that they just take the body out and bury it and forget about the whole ritual. The failure of mediation, then, was expressed by the mother's handling of the body and kissing it in a way that was not permitted and also the bystander's suggestion that one may simply dispense with ritual. Both suggest that a specific content can be given to the task of mourning rituals rather than describing

them vaguely as providing a secure world of meaning. On the occasion of a death it is precisely the too close conjunction and the complete disjunction between life and death that ritual mediates. When death is politicized as in this case (but we have many other examples ranging from the death of political leaders, death in famines, riots, to death in a revolution or a war) we inevitably have a shift of level signalled either by too close a conjuncton or complete disjunction. However, ritual can also mask the absence of mediation as our final example will show.

A final example

I should like to conclude this paper with an example of a death that shows how ritual can provide a means of dealing with problems created by modern urban environments.

Suvira was a seventy-year-old widow and had been struck by paralysis which had left her immobile and unable to care for herself. She had two sons who were married and well-settled. She also had three daughters, all of whom were married and had children.

When Suvira was stricken by paralysis she was living with her eldest son. The younger son lived in a different city and provided financial help but was unable to take her to live with him. Hence all the responsibility of caring for

the old lady fell on the eldest daughter-in-law. One has to appreciate the sorry situation in which the family found itself. Domestic help was not easily available. Suvira had become very difficult to please and seemed to hold many grudges against all her relatives. Her daughters were completely absorbed in their conjugal families and had little time to spare. Many discussions were held between the close relatives but no solution could be found to the problem. This seemed to have left all the relatives with feelings of guilt.

One week before her death, Suvira fell in a semicoma and was moved to hospital. For the seven days that she was in the hospital she could not recognize anyone. Once when she regained consciousness she instructed her son that her brother should not be allowed to touch her body, for he had not been regular in visiting her and Suvira felt betrayed by his indifference. She clearly knew that she was dying and that none of her children or siblings had cared for her in accordance with her wishes.

When Suvira died, her youngest daughter was by her bedside. The daughter claimed that she knew that the moment of death had arrived for her mother's knees jerked due to the violent encounter with death. At the final moment, her mouth had opened wide to allow the soul to escape. I was told that life escapes from one of the orifices. It is a sign of the

purity of the dying person when life departs from an upper orifice rather than a lower one. Her death had occurred in the morning at 4:00 A.M. The relatives, who had been expecting to hear news of the death, gathered in the hospital by 5:00 A.M. It was decided to take the body directly to the cremation ground. Normally the body is first brought home, but there was great tension among the relatives and the best course appeared to be an abridgement of normal wailing and mourning that usually takes place at home. No one was sure what that might bring to the surface.

There was relative silence surrounding the body. It was washed and prepared in the hospital morgue. Whereas it was Pyarelal's agnatic nephews who had washed his body, Suvira's body was washed by her daughters-in-law and her brother's wife. They insisted that daughters were not permitted to touch the body, since they belonged to other families.

While the body was being washed, the women discussed the pure and saintly nature of Suvira. This was demonstrated, they said, in the fact that there had been no bodily emissions. Her soul was pure and it was good that god had taken her away for she had suffered a lot. There were no wails or rhythmic chants of the kind that were described in the case of Pyarelal's death. I have heard such chants even in hospitals. In this case, however, the women either did not seem to need that form for the expression of grief or

else there was a fear that wailing might turn into accusations and counter-accusations. Her elder daughter-in-law seemed to be smiten by guilt. She kept crying and saying that she had performed no service, (seva) for her husband's mother. She was consoled by the other women.

A controversy arose as to who was to provide new clothes for the corpse. Customarily it is the woman's brother who provides the clothes. Suvira's sons, however, wanted to make an issue of this since he felt that his maternal uncle had given very little help in the care of his mother. Hence he insisted that the new clothes would be provided by him since his mother was not in need of "charity." Some relatives who wanted to intervene on behalf of Suvira's brother were reminded by her son that Suvira had said that her brother should not even touch her body. The boy was told, however, that dying persons often expressed wishes which were mysterious or tabooed and the living should learn to ignore these. Those who intervened on behalf of Suvira's brother were also insistent that death was not the occasion on which divisions should be expressed. In the face of death it was important to be united and solidary.

The son gave in when these arguments were made. I felt, however, that he succeeded in giving a voice to his frustration since the strained nature of the relations

between brother and sister had been expressed before the assembled relatives.

The rituals at the ghat followed much the pattern described earlier. If anything, there was meticulous attention to detail. The very best ghee and wood were used. All the discussions on the cremation ground were on the general relation between life and death. On the subsequent ceremonies also people talked of the kindness that death had shown in extending its friendly hand and how the survivors had shown their piety by performing the rituals in such a meticulous fashion.

Pyarelal had been at the apex of kinship relations. In contrast, Suvira's life had become something of an embarrassment. The tensions among the relatives which had arisen in the process of caring for her had threatened to disrupt the funeral. Ritual and clever arbitration, however, stepped in and allowed everyone to express their piety to Suvira in her death; something they had been unable to do in her life. Grief had found no expression but one suspects that the sons and daughters of Suvira would have to find ways of expressing it unaided by the interpersonal space of a funeral ceremony.

NOTES

1. This paper was first presented in a seminar of the Sociological Research Colloquium of the University of Delhi on December 16th, 1983. I wish to thank all members of the seminar who commented on the paper. I would particularly like to mention M.S.A. Rao, A.M. Shah, Patricia Uberoi, and Rajendra Pradhan for their insightful comments and to express my gratitutde to J.P.S. Uberoi for a lengthy discussion on every point of significance that arose from the paper.

2. I have found it necessary to coin the term irrealities to refer to the combination of the irrational and the unreal.

3. It may be worth quoting Levi-Strauss on this point. He says, "I am perfectly aware that it is this aspect of my work that Ricoeur is referring to when he rightly describes it as "Kantism without a transcendental subject." But far from considering this reservation as indicating some deficiency, I see it as the inevitable consequence of the ethnographic approach I have chosen, since, my ambition being to discover the conditions in which systems of truths become mutually convertible and therefore simultaneously acceptable to several different subjects, the pattern of those conditions takes on the character of an autonomous object, independent

of any subject." (Levi-Strauss 1975:11).

4. For a detailed account of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, see Jones (1976).

4. For an excellent description of a caste of funeral priests in Banaras who can abasorb the sins of the dead person, see Parry (1980).

5. This pattern of laments may have a cross-cultural character which may be seen from the following quotation in McManners (1981: 297-298):

> Indeed, savages, by their honesty in facing the reality of death and their unselfconscious respect for their dead kinsmen, have a certain superiority to civilized men.... Their funerals are marked by forceful and highly personal expressions of grief, 'They respect their dead" wrote Buffon, "They adorn them, they speak to them; they recite their great deeds, they praise their virtues; and we, who pride ourselves on our sensitivity, we do not even show ordinary human sympathy; we flee, we abandon them, we do not wish to see them, we have neither the courage nor the will to speak of them; we even avoid going to places which could recall their memory, we are either too indifferent or too weak-spirited....

In the Arab women of the Barbary coast who tear their hair and address all sorts of pleas and reproaches to the corpse, the abbe Poiret saw "une eloquence naturelle et pathetique." In Greece, Madama Chenier reported, there were similar lamentations from the women--"You are but sleeping," they say, "Do not abandon me," "I will revive you in my

embrace," " I am dragged down to the grave with you."

...."Among a people enslaved by the decencies of fashion" says Nicandre, "sorrow has to be still and silent, but with us it is eloquent and sublime."

6. For an excellent description of a caste of funeral priests in Banaras who can absorb the sins of the dead person, see Perry (1980)/

7. For details of these taboos, see Das (1982) and Nicholas (1981)

8. The ideas surrounding an "invitation" are extremely complex. Marriage and death can be seen as completely contrasting events from this perspective. In the case of a marriage, the family of the ride or groom have to visit each relative and hand over the invitation card personally, impressing upon them the importance of their participation in the event. In earlier days, the family barber would be sent with sweets to invite relatives who did not live in the city. These days the invitation card when sent to another city may contain a line seeking forgiveness for the inability of the members of the family to visit personally. Often it is considered necessary to write a personal letter, thereby giving a personal touch to the impersonal card and establishing the importance of the relationship in its

individuality.

In the case of death, no one expects an invitation. As people hear of a death they come to express their grief (afsos karna). Someone who heard of a death in a known family and did not go to mourn would be considered as violating the norms of humanity not just those of caste and kinship.

9. In some families it is customary to tie a white turban. Pink is a colour of auspiciousness and festivity and its use on this occasion is a rather loved announcement of the termination of mourning.

10. The shift to white saris in the case of widows is not as dramatic in Punjab as in some other parts of the country. This is because as women grow older they shift to white clothes which do not necessarily have coloured borders.

11. Levi-Strauss uses the linguistic concept of a code to refer to the system of sounds. He points to the significatory and communicative function of sounds in human societies and takes the systematic character of these signs as the object of her studies.

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